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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: IRAQI GOVERNMENT, DECEMBER 15th
ELECTION, TRANSPARENCY, SADDAM HUSSEIN TRIAL; BAGHDAD

SUMMARY: The major themes in today's editorials were the upcoming election and Saddam's trial.

Analysis: Independent Al-Mashriq published a page-ten column entitled, "The Trial. The Game" critiquing the mechanics of the trial and arguing that it should have been an international trial rather than an Iraqi one. The writer accused the Americans of politicizing the trial; it was "the Americans who deliberately chose Dujail as the first case, for political reasons-they regard Saddam's policy from 1980-2003 as red lines that cannot be discussed."

Independent As-Sabah Al-Jadeed's front-page editorial opined that it was important that the government fully investigate the assassination attempt that targeted Allawi during his recent visit to Najaf.

Quasi-independent As-Sabah's front-page editorial, "Independence" highlighted the importance of the Iraqi Media Network (its parent organization) remaining free and independent.

KDP affiliated Al-Taakhi wrote a page-three editorial on, "Why Our Votes Are Made of Gold" which dealt with its usual topic of late-the importance of voting for the Kurdish Alliance (list 730).

The Shi'a Ad-Dawa newspaper published page-seven editorial, "Yes to the UIA" praising the list "because it was supported by the religious authority during the former election and its members have a long history of struggling against the former regime."

Al-Adala continues dedicating page-five to editorials about the coming election. Al-Bayna's front-page editorial, "The Days of the Dictator Are Short" was critical of the trial and remarked sarcastically, "the bereaved fear that witnesses will withdraw from this trial as the lawyers have done previously. Perhaps if such weakness continues Saddam, the characteristic leader, may order the dissolution of this trial."

Baghdad published a page-two editorial entitled "Read" that indirectly criticized the UIA list for making use of Qur'anic verses for electoral advertising. Another editorial, "The Impartiality of Al-Sistani" dealt with how some electoral lists are trying to use Al-Sistani's name to support their lists. The editorial warned, "those who claim to defend religion and the religious authority must distance those elements from political competition." END SUMMARY.

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SELECTED COMMENTARIES

- [1A. "The Impartiality of the Election"](#)
(Al-Fourat - independent, anti-coalition, published this page-two editorial by Majed Fadhel Az-Zaboon)

"The upcoming election represents an important step to overcome the consequences of the American occupation of Iraq. In the upcoming election, there will be wide participation from all Iraqi political groups, including groups that boycotted the former election, and this will establish a parliament and government that lasts for four years; a government that will be able to make more active decisions than the former transitional governments, which led the country for just a few months. Therefore, citizens are looking forward to seeing a national accord government that puts the interests of citizens above all political and personal considerations and interests. This government must also start reconstruction and improve the conditions of the people.

"In spite of this optimism, a large number of citizens fear that occupation forces and neighboring countries will interfere in the upcoming election or affect its results. This issue will cause unfavorable consequences so for this reason we should choose honest figures to monitor this election. Those figures must be well known for their integrity and justice so that we will be able to overcome any significant mistakes that may happen during the election. In addition, voters must have freedom to choose and distance themselves from any influences that may affect their choice.

"The upcoming electoral process will put Iraq in front of a real challenge--between falling into an abyss and moving forward towards a new future. The next government must be composed of scientific and qualified figures who are famous for their loyalties to the country. In this way, we will be able to conquer sectarianism and begin reconstruction. It is very important for the next parliament to appoint the suitable man in the suitable place."

B. "Saddam Says Long Live Iraq"

(Al-Bayyan - affiliated with Ad-Dawa (led by Al-Ja'fari), no bias, published this page-five editorial by Salim Rasoul)

"I and the citizens of Dujail would like to reproach our people for not participating in demonstrations during Saddam's trial. We know that there were demonstrations in Najaf, Sadr City and some other areas in Baghdad but these demonstrations were small compared to Saddam's massacres. I think our people should interact to show our suffering and demonstrate how much we were tyrannized during the era of the former regime. We must put pressure on this weak and very transparent trial. We know that the Iraqi people will demand strict punishment for the rat.

"I have seen with my own eyes a group of people erecting a tent at a gate of the Green Zone shouting slogans demanding strict punishment for the criminal Saddam. I said that millions of people should join this group so that the entire world will know that all Iraqis demand the execution of Saddam. Perhaps, those who benefited from the oil coupons [i.e. corruption] like Ramsey Clark and the Qatari former minister of justice would feel ashamed because they are standing against the will of the Iraqi people.

"Why is the court so cold? This is Saddam and his name evokes memories of dark nights, terrible prisons and innocent blood and tears. Saddam said in one of his useless speeches in front of the cold court, 'Long live Iraq.' I do not know how he can greet Iraq with such a salutation. How can he address Iraq while he destroyed its economy? How can he speak to Iraq while he devastated Iraqis? But, then again what should we expect from Saddam. We feel sad when we see Saddam give his useless bombastic and speeches in court."

C. "Between Optimism and Pessimism"

(Ad-Dustoor - independent, no bias, published this front-page editorial by Bassim Al-Sheikh)

"If we think about what will happen after convening the election we will see that we have two choices, either optimism or pessimism. The optimist will see that violence, fear, terrorism, death and corruption will come to an end with the stabilization of the situation in Iraq. On the other hand, the pessimist will see that the upcoming stages will be dangerous and more disastrous than the current period.

"Optimists are people who lived and suffered during a difficult era and they think that their conditions will improve. This group of people hopes for a better future. In contrast, pessimists are obsessed with melancholy and they believe that the Iraqi situation is on the verge of an abyss. This group of people thinks that the upcoming election will push Iraq towards the deepest abysses.

"Between the two theories, Iraqi society is still under the control of the pessimists and optimists. However, rational optimism and pessimism can better analyze the Iraqi scene. We understand sometimes that we feel weak and unsatisfied but at the same time we need to have a little bit of satisfaction with our future. I think we have all the standards that enable us to overcome the current crisis. After holding the election there will be a new permanent era and this stage will depend on political stability, which will result from a popular determination that represents all spectra of Iraqi society."

D. "Only To Win Votes"

(Al-Mada - independent, no bias, published this back-page editorial by Amna Abdul Aziz)

"Election fever is picking up its pace as the countdown continues. Electoral campaigns have addressed the most

significant problems suffered by people and offered solutions, especially to the problems of security, unemployment, and other promises culminating in granting each Iraqi citizen a piece of land!!

"One of the posters had the map of Iraq surrounded by darkness with a flash of light in the center where the candidate's picture was located, indicating that all electricity problems would end with that candidate winning the elections. The poster also contained the phrase, 'Terrorism and power shortages are two sides of the same coin.'

"The truth is that power shortages have worsened these days as we approach the elections which have also been associated with many assassinations and terrorist attacks to coincide with the start of the countdown towards the elections.

"It is true indeed that power shortages and terrorism are two sides of the same coin, but will these two sides come to an end if this candidate were to win the ballot, or will it appear to be another set of unfulfilled promises that have no aim other than to gain votes."

E. "Hitting Below the Belt"
(Az-Zaman - independent, anti-coalition, published this page-five editorial by Ali Al-Jaberi)

"The countdown for the upcoming election has begun and electoral competition fever has increased among candidates and electoral lists. This electoral conflict aims to gain votes of the Iraqi people. The electoral campaign has started by launching electoral promises, slogans and dreams and all lists have started to speak about the importance of achieving people's demands and wishes. It seems that they can make all our dreams come true but [only] after the election.

"The first stage of the electoral campaign witnessed a diversity of slogans and posters. Many candidates imagine themselves the new leaders of Iraq. Wherever we go in Baghdad we will see posters carrying photos for a new dictator. We all know that slogans are not always useful. In addition, we realize that intentions of many competitors are malevolent because most of them dream of power and control. However, the second stage of the electoral campaign has witnessed a significant development. We started to see some electoral posters ripped down and other electoral ads banned from being distributed in some areas that are controlled by specific lists. Moreover, some electoral lists started to hit below the belt in an attempt to crush and destroy their competitors.

"It is impossible to say that the stage of hitting below the belt represents a popular phenomenon. It seems that this is an organized campaign funded by some electoral lists to weaken their competitors. But, I am sure that Iraqi voters will not be deceived by such tricks. This kind of electoral competition is devoid of democracy and civilization. It seems that those who conduct these acts know that they cannot gain a parliamentary seat unless they destroy their competitors.

"In any case, Iraqi voters will be free from all control when they reach the ballot boxes to cast their votes. I am surprised by the attitude of the Independent Electoral Commission of Iraq (IECI) and the current government for allowing this [mis]behavior to happen. They should have put an end to these practices. The IECI and government are responsible for providing suitable conditions and ensuring all political lists' rights. Additionally, they must protect all lists and candidates from, at least, hitting below the belt. We do not care if the hitting was above the belt because it will not cause damage."

KHALILZAD